

## **CYL thanks those who share its vision**

**By David Hennessey**

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Ken Mysogland, regional director for the Department of Children and Families (DCF), has seen a lifetime's worth of atrocities in his time with the organization.

At Monday evening's Center for Youth Leadership (CYL) annual awards ceremony at the Brien McMahon-based Center for Global Studies, Mysogland recalled in front of more than 100 students the story of a 16-year-old girl whose life had been torn apart by heroin use, an abusive relationship with a man eight years her senior and prostitution. In addition to that horrific tale, Mysogland remembered the case of an 11-month-old baby that ingested cocaine and was brought to the hospital hallucinating, reaching out into open air for people who were not there.

Both the young girl and the child survived their harrowing ordeals.

These stories, Mysogland said, should not strike uncertainty into the hearts of those who want to bring about change, but should instead motivate us all to help those less fortunate than ourselves.

"We didn't prevent the first act of abuse or neglect, but we can absolutely prevent the next one," he said.

Mysogland and Domestic Abuse Services in Greenwich were recipients of the Senators Community Foundation (SCF) Candy Necklace award Monday night. CYL is the umbrella organization for SCF and the Peace Project. The SCF presents the annual award to the persons or organizations that have done the most over the past year to prevent and address child abuse.

"This is what has become of our world. It is a brutal, sobering world that we live in," Mysogland said in his acceptance speech. "But it is amazing to me the power of the human spirit."

Both Mysogland and Suzanne Adam, executive director of Domestic Abuse Services, credited the CYL for its proactive initiatives.

"By your tenacious efforts, you have prevented so much harm to so many people," Mysogland said.

The Hartford Courant, Fox 61 News and Jim and Lorena DeFlorio, owners of DeFlorio's Market in South Norwalk, were recipients of the Peace Project's Dove Award Monday

night. That award is presented to the persons or organizations who have done the most over the past year to promote peace and social injustice like the Peace Project does.

The Courant and Fox 61 were honored because of their, --insightful and in-depth coverage of domestic violence," according to information from the CYL.

Naedine Hazell, editor of the Courant, accepted the award. "We're reporting on what exists," she said. "The hard work is being done by organizations like the Center for Youth Leadership."

Lorena DiFlorio said that in her tireless work with and generosity towards Norwalk's day laborers, she is only acting upon what she loves to do.

"I wanted to thank you from the bottom of my heart. For me, [the laborers] become a part of my life, they become a part of my family. I just try to do my best to help them," she said.

Attending the ceremony were a number of local officials, including: state Rep. Larry Cafero (R-Norwalk), state Sen. Bob Duff (D-Norwalk), state Rep. Chris Perone (D-Norwalk) state Sen. Toni Boucher (R-26), state Rep. Bruce Morris (D-Norwalk) and state Rep. Terrie Wood (D-Norwalk, Darien).

Morris encouraged all of the students to continue their courageous efforts.

"By the work that you are doing, you are demonstrating that you are tomorrow's leaders, today. You are doing things we can't get many adults to do. I am so hopeful for what tomorrow brings because of you."

Boucher said, "You have made a strong statement that the community does care."

"You say passion, not pity," Duff said, referring to one of the CYL's mottos. "I think that is a wonderful creed to live by. We can't live saying things are too big to deal with....Carry your passion with you for the rest of your careers, for the rest of your lives."

The Center for Youth Leadership is the largest youth activism organization in Fairfield County and one of the largest in Connecticut. Its mission is to promote social change. It was established in 1999 when six students asked for help in examining the connection between academic achievement and where students live in Norwalk. The CYL's Senators Community Foundation raises awareness of child abuse, including shaken baby syndrome, safe havens for newborns, animal cruelty and its connection to abuse, and human trafficking. The CYL's Peace Project promotes safe schools and communities. It focused on four issues: teen dating violence, human trafficking, the rights of day laborers and stalking.

The Center for Youth Leadership, which has grown to 220 members, is the recipient of the Governor's Educational Citizenship Award; the Night of the Child Award from Prevent Child Abuse Connecticut; the Volunteer Service Award from the United Way of Coastal Fairfield County; and the First for Kids Award from Connecticut Voices for Children.